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Edu. 702.22 Fall 2010

Literature Review

Studies have shown that 50% of novice teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years (O’Brian, B. 2003). The support and guidance of mentors, colleagues, administrations and principles are vital to the needs of a novice teacher’s development and success. Principles must be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of novice teachers and can provide indirect support through mentoring programs so that new teachers can be observed and analyzed in order to solve problems (Stansbury, K. 2001). Principles set the tone, expectations, standards and overall culture within schools. As such, they are responsible directly and indirectly for putting systems in place that support and nurture the development of new teachers. A focused effort on this problem is needed if we are to provide our students with consistent and competent educators. Successful principles coupled induction programs and individual assistance in order to maximize the professional development of new teachers (Ganser, T. 2002). Many of the ineffective principles were described as floaters who were not directly involved with new teachers or the induction process Angelle, P. (2002). There is a gap between the perception and reality between the support principles feel they are giving new teachers and the support novice teachers feel they are getting. It is ultimately the responsibility of the principle to bridge this gap (Powell, L. 2004).

New teachers are expected to perform at and are held to the same standards as veteran teachers. They are expected to know and be prepared for all aspects of the profession upon entry when in reality they are not. They are overwhelmed with not only how to teach their particular students and subject area but also expected to be knowledgeable about procedural and site specific information (Graziano, C). Negative school experiences and inadequate support can damage the professional life of a novice teacher causing fear, isolation, self doubt, and frustration that ultimately causes them to leave the profession. Often the support systems are inadequate or virtually non-existent. In addition to the lack of support some novice teachers feel disrespected and devalued by their principle and colleagues. Particularly those who voiced their troubles and actively sought the support needed. Negative experiences such as these add to the frustration, anxiety and waning self esteem new teachers typically experience. These experiences not only damage the professional life and development but also invade upon their personal lives. The pressures of managing a classroom compounded by a basic lack of resources and administrative support leaves new teachers unprepared socially, professionally and emotionally. The sink or swim attitude encourages new teachers to cling to practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the needs of their students. Induction and preservice experiences need to be provided so teachers learn desirable lessons from their early teaching experiences (Cookson, P., Nagel, N., Carreker, S. 2005).

Despite research findings noting the importance of creating positive induction experiences for new teachers all school districts are not required to have mentorship programs. Many educational budgets do not believe mentorship programs are worthwhile. Some state education departments require novice teachers be provided with a mentor. These new teachers are assigned to more experienced teachers who help them identify strengths, weaknesses and improve their teaching practices so growth continues when support is withdrawn (Hope, W 1999.) Mentors must be skilled at providing instructional support and should be models of lifelong learners. Effective mentors are supportive and provide new teachers with empathy and understanding in a no-judgmental manner. They must have string interpersonal skills as they deal with varying personalities. They must provide novice teachers with hope and optimism and they must be deeply committed to the role of mentor (Rowley, J. 1999). Unfortunately even when mentoring programs are in place, mentors don’t have the time or sometimes the desire to mentor adequately (Terrell, H. 2005).

A significant relationship can be found between quality mentoring and its effect on the outcomes of teacher’s feelings of success and student achievement. The strongest factor that has affected teacher retention was having a mentor who actually taught in the same school as the novice teacher. Mentors who have this experience are able to be of more assistance when they have this type of site specific knowledge (Rockoff, J. 2008). Regardless of personal circumstances or characteristics of novice teachers the primary role influencing career decisions is the particular school site. The teachers who felt most successful with students were most likely to stay in the profession. Schools who are structured and organized around the growth of teachers and students felt more competent and able to meet the demands placed on them. Too often, schools fall short in meeting some of the most basic conditions needed to succeed (Moore, S. 2008). Predictors of a teacher’s level of commitment include the perceptions of how their teaching will affect student learning and learning opportunities which include mentoring and other professional development opportunities (Rosenhotz, S, Simpson, C. 1990).

Some programs actively involve novice teachers in existing learning communities where new and veteran teachers work with principals through collaboration, study and research (Watkins, P. 2005). This approach involves stresses the need for teachers becoming involved in a growing network that moves beyond the one to one mentoring approach that is common today. An essential element is that all share the responsibility for each other’s success and the success of the students. Strong professional learning communities must be developed to meet the needs of 21st century learners (Grossman, P., Valencia, C., Yoon, I., Lee, C. 2005). New teachers need to feel like they are part of a professional community at the onset of their careers. They need to know that their input and ideas are valued and respected by their colleagues and administrators. New teacher’s participation in a professional community gas a powerful effect on their abilities to develop effective teaching strategies that show results in meeting students needs (Watkins, P. 2005). Principles need to embrace this notion of “communities of practice” to develop a culture that not only benefits new teachers but the entire school community. Mentorship requires a collective effort and involvement when teaching is viewed as an intellectual, moral, and political endeavor (Cherian, F., Daniel, Y. 2008). 2009)

Working conditions and issues of support are primary factors in teacher retention. “Put a good teacher in a bad system and the system wins every single time” (Schwartz, R., Wurtzel, J., Olsen, L. 2007). While most studies focus on individual teacher’s strengths, weaknesses and dispositions, state, district school and departmental contexts also shape beliefs, concerns and practices and their opportunities for learning (Grossman, P., Valencia, C. 2001). The role of school districts and administrative structures are key features in developing effective leadership roles and preparation programs that train administrators who can provide teachers with success. Just as learning should be enjoyable so should teaching. We can retain teachers by giving them respect, support and a voice in decision making (Luther, V., Richmond, L.).